

Valley citrus growers welcome weekend freeze

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Citrus growers have welcomed the freezing overnight lows that have affected the Valley in the past week.

Temperatures in Fresno hovered around the freezing mark, said Kevin Durfee, meteorologist at the National Weather Service office in Hanford. The coldest outlying areas, such as Lemoore, had lows between 27 to 28 degrees.

But those chilly temperatures did not last too long, so no damage was done to the citrus trees or fruit.

California Citrus Mutual, a nonprofit trade association of growers, said that the conditions have been ideal early in the navel orange season because the chill improves fruit color and flavor.

The Valley's mandarin crop, which is traditionally less cold-weather tolerant, appears to be unscathed by the recent drop in overnight temperatures. Mandarin growers reported operating wind machines over the weekend to push temperatures up in the groves. A strong inversion layer in some areas also helped to keep temperatures manageable.

For the week ahead, the lows in Fresno are expected to dip to 38 degrees Tuesday morning and then rise steadily to 44 degrees by Friday.

The next storm system will reach the Valley around Thursday evening and will be much warmer than the last storm, which originated from the Gulf of Alaska. Rainfall amounts will be less than a quarter-inch in the Valley.

The snow level in the Sierra initially will range between 7,000 to 8,000 feet and will drop to 5,000 feet Thursday night, the weather service said.